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SUBJECT: VOTER REGISTRATION STAFF CUT, POLITICAL PARTIES SADDLED
WITH VOTER EDUCATION

11. (SBU) Summary: On October 13, the National Elections Commission (NEC) announced that it will cut its voter registration staff from 10,000 to 1,500, a number which election experts say is sufficient to register only 40 percent of the eligible electorate. The NEC also announced that political parties would bear much of the responsibility for distributing voter education and registration information; in response, the parties complained that they had neither the time nor the funds to carry out these responsibilities. Southern Sudan election preparation is behind schedule due to insufficient attention from the National Election Commission, lack of Southern representation on the NEC, and a severe lack of capacity and funding for the Southern Sudan High Election Committee. End Summary

INSUFFICIENT VOTER REGISTRATION STAFF

12. (SBU) On October 13, poloff met with Jerome Leyraud, Country Director for the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and Renzo Hettinger, European Commission electoral advisor. Both Leyraud and Hettinger highlighted concerns that the NEC had reneged on the voter registration plan to which it had agreed with election advisors. As previously agreed, the NEC had proposed hiring approximately 10,000 staff to conduct voter registration. The new plan, which the NEC is in the process of implementing, provides for only 1,498 registration staff for the entire country. The NEC did not give a reason for the change, but Leyraud and Hettinger suspect that the NEC realized it does not have enough time to hire and train 10,000 staff before voter registration begins on November 1. The new, lower staffing level will likely result in registration of only 40 to 50 percent of voters, according to Leyraud. The NEC declined to specify how voter registration staff will be hired, or according to what standards, the elections advisors said.

13. (SBU) Leyraud and Hettinger stated they are disappointed that the NEC unilaterally decided on the new plan without informing or consulting technical advisors or the international community. This incident has led to a deteriorating relationship between the NEC and election advisors, Leyraud and Hettinger reported.

POLITICAL PARTIES HANDED LAST MINUTE RESPONSIBILITIES

14. (SBU) At a political party workshop hosted by the NEC on October 13, political parties were informed that they "share full responsibility" for voter education and distribution of registration requirements and information. Despite having given the parties these new responsibilities, the NEC and Government of National Unity officials made no provision to provide funding to parties for this purpose. Representatives of political parties expressed concern

that there is not enough time to prepare for or raise funds to do voter education for registration. According to the NEC, parties will not receive financial assistance.

15. (SBU) According to Ray Kennedy, United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) Chief Electoral Affairs Advisor, as well as election advisors Hettinger and Leyraud, the NEC has yet to begin a voter education campaign. The NEC insists it will begin a campaign on TV and radio, but that planning is still in the preliminary stages. In addition, UNMIS is receiving reports from political parties in many states that the State Election High Committees are asking political parties to shoulder the bulk of the work.

SOUTHERN PREPARATION SEVERELY BEHIND SCHEDULE

16. (SBU) In a NEC technical committee meeting on October 12 attended by election advisors, the NEC acknowledged that while voter registration preparation in the North is "on track", they are not sure about the status of preparations in the South. NEC officials also acknowledged that they had heard from officials on the ground that preparation is severely behind schedule, and that it will be impossible for registration to begin in the South on November 1.

17. (SBU) According to Leyraud, the Southern Sudan Election High Committee (SSEHC) lacks the resources and capacity to prepare for voter registration. SSEHC officials have told him that financial transfers from the NEC have not been completed, and they are confused about when and from where their funding will come. Members of the SSEHC also informed Leyraud that election preparation is far behind schedule, and that the SSEHC has been lobbying for the

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appointment of a Southerner to the vacant NEC commissioner seat. The latter opened a year ago following the death of the previous commissioner. According to the SSEHC, the Presidency in Khartoum is delaying this appointment.

18. (SBU) COMMENT: The National Election Commission appears to be transferring responsibility for voter education to political parties as a way to reduce its accountability in the face of what could be an impending voter registration disaster. Coupled with the reduced number of registration staff, this development seems certain to result in only a small portion of the eligible electorate being registered to vote. Election advisors fear that when registration day comes, constituents will know little, if anything, about where to register, what identification will be required, and also lack other essential information.

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